

be developed with the help of specialized public relations professionals. To avoid delays when minutes matter, the legal team should review the communications plan ahead of time. Press kits in local languages that provide a clear and consistent message should be prepared for every region in which the company operates.

5. Provide Media Training

The best communication plans include media training for executives. Even seasoned execs may stumble in front of the press if they are unaware of the impact of their words or do not recognize the risks of off-the-cuff remarks to reporters.

Media training should include mock press conferences to prepare company leaders to handle a flurry of questions under the spotlight. Because regional and site managers may also be called upon to speak to the press or local officials, they should also receive training. Communication best practices should include developing and conveying consistent messages, cooperating with the media and local officials, providing regular, fact-based updates and avoiding simply saying “no comment.”

6. Engage Social Media

Because rumors and misinformation about a disaster are likely to spread over social media along with the news, the company should be prepared to communicate its messages in real time. Those messages should be developed and approved by the legal team in advance, so that the company can respond quickly when information about a crisis starts spreading. The company should monitor social media to gauge public opinion and correct misinformation or rumors.

7. Manage Costs

Because the expenses of responding to a catastrophe are likely to be far higher than anticipated, companies should make sure that their insurance coverage responds to any extra costs. The expenses are likely to include public relations consulting fees; travel for executives; emergency third-party costs such

SOCIAL MEDIA AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLANNING

BY TERRI HOWARD



For years, news was shared through sound bites, reporter stand-ups and anchor chatter. The editorial process behind the business of news-gathering dictated a certain pace and also ensured a certain level of reliability and objective accuracy.

Today, that approach has been replaced by one that is 140 characters long, and social media websites like Twitter and Facebook have become the most active and volatile method of dispersing information in a crisis. These sites not only offer a platform for organizing crowd actions, they also provide insights into how a situation might morph and develop.

In short, social media can now affect business continuity planning in countless ways. But through the following steps, all companies can improve their response to any crisis:

RECOGNIZE INCREASED SPEED AND VOLUME

The first inkling of a crisis event is now far more likely to occur through a Twitter feed or Facebook posting than a story on a cable news network. It is important to establish proven, well-organized strategies and tactics that allow you to respond on a dime when needed.

BEWARE OF PERVASIVE INACCURACIES

There is no editorial process to moderate either the pace or accuracy of the information conveyed by social media. The commingling of fact, opinion, speculation and repetition creates a whole new class of information. You must be prepared to respond not only to the real crisis but also to possible fears generated by rumors or false information.

BE TRANSPARENT

Social media audiences seem to feel a right to know anything and everything about a crisis and the people and companies behind it. Any hesitation to communicate the latest facts risks being seen as a cover-up.

CREATE A “LISTENING POST”

A “listening post” is simply a term for the electronic platform used to synthesize news about your company across all types of media, including traditional print, blogs and Twitter. It is an all-in-one method of monitor-

ing this new flow of information to learn what people are saying about your company or the crisis situation, in real time.

MONITOR EMERGING THREATS

Often, social media venues now are the first place people go to share thoughts or vent. Careful monitoring of social media may allow you to identify emerging problems, spot disgruntled employees or address risks prior to a crisis hitting.

CUSTOMIZE SOLUTIONS

Comments made in the social media realm often contain emotion that is absent in objective journalistic stories. This allows you to read, in real-time, the specific emotions people are experiencing about a given situation or your company in particular. You can then craft the best support solutions to address those concerns.

EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF YOUR RESPONSE

Establish baselines regarding the number of conversations that typically occur about your company or a situation. Note how many people talk about it, how often and for how long. This will help you quickly gauge the impact of a crisis—especially if there is a swift uptick in chatter—and assess the impact of your company’s response. You also will be able to track how the tone of conversation changes—positively or negatively—throughout a crisis and tailor your response tactics.

MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

Find ways to coordinate with marketing or public relations to gauge how social media impacts your business continuity. Although the roles of threat assessment and communications are very different during an actual crisis event, the team’s combined efforts can address trouble areas, share accurate information and calm those involved. ■

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